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# MACKENZIE KING

*By*

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## THE WAGE EARNER

It's false, the story that's going round that if King is returned to power the factories will be closed and workers thrown on the untender mercies of public relief. The truth is that *King's Way* will speed up the wheels and help the wage earners. You shake your head and exclaim: "What is a man to believe!" you say "Some say one thing and some another;" and ask, "How is one to decide what's what, in politics?"

I confess it is difficult and sometimes one is tempted to turn aside in despair, in this particular matter, truth will yield to reason; I promise it; you may for yourself decide on which side your bread is buttered. However, we shall have to get some of the smoke out of our eyes before we begin.

When King broke into public life with all sorts of academic degrees certifying that he had graduated and post-graduated in the relations between governments and industry, his opponents recognised in him a formidable challenger for power. They had themselves been brought up in the Stand-By Policy and knew how to go forward only by the painful process of "trial and error." Clearly, something had to be done, and smartly done, otherwise people would naturally turn to the man who had been equipped to serve them. King's opponents fell back upon the ancient dodge of picturing strength as weakness.

"King is a theorist," they said, and they said it with a mass production of words, they wrote it in editorials; they whispered it at the clubs; they shouted it on the hustings from Sydney to Nanaimo. "King is a theorist. One 'to deal out rules

Most fit for practice, but for one poor fault

That into practice, they can ne'er be brought.'"

Now it is a strange thing about politics, when you keep on repeating a thing, some people are silly enough, through sheer insistence, to believe it; you may say black is white and, if you say it often enough, there are people who will actually think white is not white. Of course those very people would not allow a plumber to set their broken bones; they would insist upon having one trained in surgery; and yet they were brought to feel that the man who knows most about the Science of Politics knows least about the actual administration of government. Some of them give half an apology by saying: "where there is smoke, there must be fire."

But there were people who did not unreason that way and, in course of time, King came into power with an opportunity of putting his theories into practice. Later on, we shall look at results; meantime, with the smoke out of our eyes, let us have a close-up view of some of Mr. King's theories.

King began with the theory that Society is no safer than the contentment of the people (and not a bad theory). He believed in what we now call social legislation; he was a pioneer of the world's 20th century labour movement advocating that the place for children is the school, not the factory; that women and men should not be required to work for

subsistence-wages, nor work long hours that leave no time for thought and recreation; he fought for sanitary factories; he fought for the social insurances; and mind you, he did these things when the going was none too good, for King was a part of the early movement in social legislation and was Canada's most prominent contribution. More than twenty years ago, I met a man from San Salvador who had heard of but one Canadian: King the apostle of Humanity in Labour. These things have not yet been adopted the world-over. Each nation has its own factory-legislation and thus each nation must protect its own living-standards.

And now I have landed you plumb upon the rock of the tariff-issue. It can't be helped; although, at times, greatly exaggerated, the tariff has to do with foreign competition and livings; luckily we have to decide only one phase of the issue namely, whether the wage earner's job is safer, *King's Way* or other ways. I will state the facts; you will make your own decision.

And first, an outline of the methods by which tariff schedules were made between 1926-30 by the Liberals.

(1) Mr. King established a Tariff Board (the first in Canada). Everyone was free to apply for change in duties, either up or down, and the application was referred to the Board for investigation. The hearings of the Board were open to the public and anyone could argue for or against the application.

(2) The proceedings of the Board were recorded, printed and given to the public (upon payment of a small fee.)

(3) The people's representatives had ample time to study the evidence which the Board presented before they came to Parliament and, of course, long before they were called upon to vote upon the items of the Budget.

You will find a contrast in the methods of tariff making instituted by Mr. Bennett. One of his first official acts was the abolition of the Tariff Board.

(1) After Mr. Bennett (with the help of Mr. Stevens) had effected changes in two or three hundred items of the tariff schedule, he established a new Tariff Board (and no one has ever explained why Mr. Bennett put the cart before the horse.)

(2) The proceedings of the New Tariff Board were recorded *but not printed* and, of course, not generally circulated, with the result that the public had scant knowledge of tariff-facts.

(3) When the Budget was brought down, under Mr. Bennett's administration, a single type-written copy of the Board's evidence was placed on the Table of the Commons (and one copy was certainly not enough for the joint use of some 245 members).

(4) The Members of Parliament did not always receive even one copy between them for sometimes Mr. Bennett's Tariff Board *held secret sessions* and the evidence taken was divulged only to the Cabinet. Then the peoples' representatives had to vote in the dark.

Now if you are a wage-earner, or an owner, of a protected industry, whether it be factory or field, I ask where lies security? with *Kings Way* of having tariff-rates decided by public opinion formed upon facts? or with decisions made by Cabinets with or without the advice of a Tariff Board? Say what you

will, protection is privilege; it may be justified, but it requires justification. If you are a grower of sugar beets, I ask you to consider what happens when Brown ships his potatoes to Cuba. The Cuban government takes some of his potatoes by way of duties; when Brown brings back sugar he receives in payment (or its equivalent), the Canadian government takes some of the sugar. You may have an explanation that will satisfy Mr. Brown and those who put sugar on porridge but, off hand, the exporter believes he is being done both going and coming.

This matter of industrial security is the world's problem—the relation of wages-earners, one to the other, some working to supply foreign demands and others the needs of the home market. Personally I can see only one solution for the tariff and its problem of foreign competition—the decision of an informed people, item by item, through an informed representation in Parliament.

I believe *King's Way* offers more security to wage-earners than any other way. When the judgment of the people has been passed, you have the best basis of security; without it, you must always have a suspicion that breeds discontent. I say *King's Way*, because it was Mackenzie King who insisted that the people should have the widest possible knowledge about tariff matters. For years I served on the Tariff Board under Mr. King's administration. "Get the facts" said King, "get the facts," he repeated times again, "give them to the public and the representatives of the people must take the responsibility of action."

That is *King's Way* of handling tariff matters and it works for the good of the wage-earner. I am

not guessing, I know; and I have the figures to *prove* it. In 1921, when King, the Theorist, took over the administration of the country's affairs, the country's forty leading industries had a pay-roll of \$391,919,-145 and, in 1930, as he turned over the administration to Mr. Bennett, the pay-roll of the forty industries had grown to \$551,853,649 (and in the previous year they were \$624,302.170.) Mind you, those figures represent the pay-roll of wage-earners in manufacturing establishments. Check them. They are government figures; they are correct. But if you have the habit of measuring pay-rolls by what your own will buy of the needs of life; food, fuel, clothes, etc., then I ask you to compare what you had *King's Way* with what you have had afterwards. When you have done that, I rest my case. You will agree with me, King knows how.

### THE OBSTINATE IDEALIST

When King came first to College I was already a seasoned man of eighteen, in my second year, and a Sophomore rarely misjudges a Freshman; I said then that King was an idealist; I have known him for years as a Statesman and I say now King is an obstinate idealist. He came to college clinging to the idea that poverty was quite unnecessary in Canada and he has never let go.

People find all sorts of fault with King and some there are who say he is not a "good mixer"; and, with some truth, as the phrase goes; he lacked an early training in mixtures. I doubt if King ever swiped signs on Halloween or broke windows or heads; not that he hadn't the disposition, he hadn't

the time, he was one of those fortunate students who had to work themselves through college. Besides, he had his mind on his job. If he was to become Prime Minister some day, and abolish poverty, he must know how to do it. A man does not become a carpenter just because someone hands him a hammer and nails; nor does a man become a statesman just because people vote him into power.

Picture King, then, for yourself, at seventeen, ransacking the University College library for books that told of how men, at other times and places, had sought to bring about the reign of social justice. Or, look in, as King with Barr, O'Higgins, Greenwood, Macmillan and other chosen souls sit in Old Residence, until the small hours, discussing social systems designed to relieve the inequalities of life. Better still, come with me back to the Literary Society where King first denounced inhumanity and proclaimed the dignity of labour. (It was then that Mackenzie King and Sir Hamar Greenwood learned the art of public speech).

King might have left college a dentist, a surgeon, a lawyer, qualified in anyone of the professions; instead, he graduated as an economist; and shortly afterwards bought a ticket for the United States. Since his American visit has become the subject of public comment, it deserves a word of explanation. King went to the scene of labour trouble in the United States because he wanted to know just what happened when Capital and Labour become locked in deadly embrace. When he arrived on the ground, things began to happen. The student was recognised as an authority; the youth who came to learn

remained to teach. I can think of no other Canadian, industrialist or professional, who ever made good in the United States, more completely and more instantaneously, than King in the intricate field of American Labour.

Had he chosen, King could have had a distinguished academic career, for the doors of the American Universities were open to him; he could have gone on solving labour problems, for both men and masters respected his insight into their problems and above all, both admired his ability to interpret one to the other. King might have gone far—

But King came back. Having set out to correct the social abuses of Canada, he returned to the job. His American experience was but a testing ground and when he had taken the tests with flying colours he took up the problems of his own land.

But you say: "It is all very well to remind us of those things; no doubt Mr. King had high ideals, but, tell us what he has done? That's the thing that counts—results. King has been Minister of Labour and Prime Minister, and, still, in this year of our Lord, there are hundreds of thousands who would work and have no work. Abject poverty dwells next door to blatant wealth."

It was with those thoughts in mind that I went back to the days of King as Freshman and on to the days of King as Statesman. For the moment let us lay aside impatience and look at the causes of King's delay. For it is a matter of delay. When King came back to Canada, it was to face the bitterest opposition of Canadian reactionary forces. The Tory press that now pleads a "Chance for Youth"; then scoffed at the idea of youth's public service. "What

good can come from Young Willie King?" they asked. They attacked King because he was young; and they kept up the attack until King was well past his forties which might have been highly humourous had it not weakened the confidence of the people in Mr. King's ability to carry out his plans for social betterment.

Since King had won his first victories in the United States, a hostile press asked the people to believe that King could not possibly be patriotic. Tories then fairly frothed as they thought of reciprocity; they would have neither truck nor trade with the Yankees; and all the while (if we may now believe Mr. Bennett) the prosperity of the Canadian people depended upon an interchange of goods across the border.

"King is a reformer," it was charged. And that charge was absolutely true. King advocated the social insurances when others were denouncing them as new-fangled notions, dangerous innovations that would eventually destroy the social structure.

And finally, all, save the youngest of us, will recall the charge that King is the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, the man who struggled hardest and sacrificed most that Canadians might govern themselves. "King is a chip from the Mackenzie block," they said; and that charge was true.

While we look at the several obstacles which King faced in his efforts to abolish poverty, may I dwell only with the last one—King's obstinate defence of self-government; it The Issue of The Present Time. How may men reform themselves? That is the problem; social life lies within a body politic. Beyond doubt Stalin and Mussolini desire to reform Rus-

sians and Italians and they say definitely the thing cannot be done so long as the people elect their governments. So it came about that most Europeans were deprived of votes and political liberties for what someone believed to be their own good, and, now European States are throwing their people into crucibles that they may be poured into common national moulds.

That is not King's idea of reform, and it is not mine. While I am a supporter of the Liberal Party, I commit only myself when I state the principles of Liberalism and, of course, I have no authority to express Mr. King's views; but this I know, Mr. King rejects Mr. Bennett's practice of announcing surprise packages of policy. Mr. King announces policy only after wide-spread and official consultation with the representatives of the people. I do not know, but I suspect, Mr. King stands aghast at Mr. Stevens' dictatorial methods of party organisation and he must have been simply shocked when Mr. Stevens openly adopted the Fascist slogan: "One for all and all for One."

The other day I was told a story which, although it may not be true, will illustrate my idea of King's attitude toward political parties and their relation to public life. At a conference of party leaders it is said that someone suggested that since one section of the Tory party had unfurled the banner "Vote Bennett" and another section had adopted the slogan "Vote Stevens", the Liberals should come across with an appeal to "Vote King." It is said King rejected the suggestion with a flare of temper (and he has a temper). For King, the leader of the Liberal Party is its servant; let other parties be

what they are, for King, Liberalism, ceases to exist when the people are no longer free to think out policies for themselves. No one man is to subject the people to his will, not even in the cause of reform.

If you would know why King as a Statesman so strenuously holds to those views I think I can throw light on the matter, by taking you back again to the day of King the Freshman. Then he was a disciple of Edmund Burke and you will recall Burke's precept; "The great inlet by which a colour of oppression has entered into the world is by one man pretending to determine the happiness of others." The thought is a basic one.

For all I know, back in his school days, Richard Bennett may have been another reader of Burke but he could not have been an apt pupil for Burke's precepts did not stick in his mind; he now derides as old-fashioned the political philosophy of the Georgians and the Victorians; he has told us frankly that he has been recently influenced by the doctrines of certain modern writers, whose names I have forgotten but I promise to name their counter-parts in the thought of the Middle Ages, when it was generally supposed that society could not be preserved without armed men at every corner of life. Be that as it may, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Stevens are both plainly wrong in their theory of the "common tread." for policemen never yet created a heaven on earth and never will.

And now I have to confess I have left undone what I intended to do, namely sketch a life picture of King as Student and Statesman, instead I have wound up by quoting Edmund Burke, with Bentham, Gladstone and Asquith ringing in my ears. Plainly

I am not the man for the task; for me, King's personality merges in his work, and I simply cannot distinguish between them. I have reason to know that King is a prince among hosts and yet I could not tell you whether I had pork chops or broiled chicken the last time I dined at Laurier House. I recall only what my host said about the necessity of social reform. Others may have had a different experience, I can relate only my own and the exception proves the rule for we once spent an hour talking about rheumatisms.

I doubt if anyone can successfully disassociate Mackenzie King from his work; true he has not yet completed it, but I would have you know he has gone far towards its completion. Let us lay aside our party-prejudices, for a while and look squarely at King's record of performance as it is written in times most of us remember. The economists of the League of Nations, by actual survey, placed the living-standards of Canadian workers as among the world's three best in 1926; by a second survey, in 1930, they again gave Canada a place among the three leading nations and then, remember, it was in 1922 that Mackenzie King, with Liberalism, took Canada out of the economic doldrums. The records will have it that Canada was never more prosperous than under Liberal administration. If you call it chance, then I shall ask you to give Mackenzie King a chance to finish his work.

Years have passed since he came to college with his head (and heart) full of theories. Doubtless he has dropped some of those theories as impracticable, others have been tempered with time, for King is now the Empire's most experienced statesman; but

this I happen to know King still holds fast to the idea that poverty can be abolished from the path of all industrious Canadians. He is an obstinate idealist.

The other day one of those annoying candid friends told me I was forever neglecting to draw the moral of my arguments. It is true; I prefer to place facts before people and stand aside while they draw their own conclusions. (They will do it anyway.) People that want to repeat in Canada the Russian experience (with variations) will vote for the C.C.F. candidates of Mr. Woodsworth; while those that prefer Fascism will follow the banner of "One for all and all for one," and, upon the word of Mr. Bennett, Mr. Stevens aims at dictatorship. (Mr. Bennett knows Mr. Stevens better than I do.) If anyone wants to lose his vote naturally he will vote for Mr. Bennett's candidates.

The moral is as plain as the face on the town clock. If you desire a return of good times, then vote for the Liberal Party that gave you good times. But if you really insist upon abolishing the fear of honest want from the Canadian mind then make King's cause your own. Work as hard in your way as he does in his. For it does mean work; the majorities of his candidates must be so high that not even the Senate will be able to block the way as the obstinate idealist makes the last turn in the long, hard road to a realisation of his life's objective.

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